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Current Opinion

Catholic Thought and Biblical Criticism

The attitude of some Catholic scholars toward the higher and the lower criticism of the Bible is interestingly reflected in recent articles in the *New York Review*.¹ In the third of a series of articles on "The Higher Criticism of the Bible," Dr. Francis E. Gigot expresses himself as entirely favorable to that method of study. "The problems of the higher criticism of the Bible are the lawful subject-matter of scientific investigation. Questions relative to the authorship, date, literary form, integrity, etc., of the Sacred Writings may be reverently, yet scientifically, examined in the light of principles which will commend themselves to unbiased scholarship. Such is the general position of students of the higher criticism of the Bible; and, obviously, its correctness can hardly be questioned by any fair-minded man." In such study, the examination of a book itself for evidence as to its date, integrity, etc., is of chief importance, and is all the more imperatively to be made in the case of the biblical books, so many of which are anonymous. Dr. Gigot is the author of a considerable work on Old Testament introduction, and his views on critical method are therefore of the more interest and weight.

In the same journal W. L. Sullivan discusses the Three Heavenly Witnesses of I John 5:7, especially in connection with Künstle's *Comma Johaneum* (1905).² Holding that the decree of the Roman Inquisition of 1897 does not preclude the study of the problem, he shows that the textual evidence is overwhelmingly against the passage, of which the Spanish Gnostic Priscillian of the fourth century was probably the author. Sullivan strongly condemns the view that the infallibility of the church is involved in the authenticity of the disputed verse, and that loyalty to the church requires of every Catholic that he accept the text, despite the verdict of criticism. Catholicity will in these modern days be better served by candid acceptance of the plain findings of scholarship.

The Latest Missionary Apologia

Mr. Chester Holcombe, for fourteen years secretary of the American legation at Peking and three times acting minister for the United States to

¹ "The Higher Criticism of the Bible," *New York Review*, September–October, 1906, pp. 158–61.

² "The Three Heavenly Witnesses," *ibid.*, pp. 175–88.

China, in a recent *Atlantic Monthly* article, entitled "The Missionary Enterprise in China," answers conclusively the charge, so frequently repeated, that the missionary is chiefly responsible for the anti-foreign sentiment of China. In the Boxer rebellion, Mr. Holcombe maintains, the missionary suffered not because he was a missionary, but because he was a foreigner. To say that the missionary is "forcing" Christianity upon a people already provided with a religion which entirely satisfies its needs is at least disingenuous. The Christian preacher in China is pursuing precisely the methods he employs at home. He is content in either case to present Christianity, for acceptance or rejection. That the missionary has at least as good a right to enter China and to follow his particular calling there as any American or European trader in cotton, goods, kerosene, or opium is too obvious to need argument. Not satisfied, however, to claim for the Christian teacher equal rights of residence in China with the foreign merchant or railway-builder, Mr. Holcombe goes on to show that, so far from hindering amicable commercial relations between China and the western world, the missionary has done very much to further them. The development of trade with the Occident is a very important "by-product" of the missionary enterprise. A complete and worthy apology for missions must, of course, take higher ground than this, and sweep a wider range. Nations do not live by trade alone. And it is hardly to be supposed that missionaries would obey a summons to retreat even should their work prove disadvantageous to commerce. But at least the objection that the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ in China hurts trade would appear to be disposed of once for all by this temperate and judicial review of the situation.

Close upon this notable article, and offering another vigorous contribution to the "missions vs. commerce" discussion, comes a paper in the *Outlook* of October 6, by Frederick McCormick, an Associated Press correspondent in Russia and Manchuria, entitled "Has the War Eliminated America from the Far East?" Mr. McCormick deals at length with three matters in dispute—trade, politics, and missions, educational and religious. Upon the third of these topics he speaks with great plainness and directness, and the missionary could hardly ask for a completer and more satisfactory vindication. That the foreign residents in a treaty port should, with rare exceptions, be indifferent to missions, if not actually hostile, is a matter of course. "The missionaries are *in* China. The communities are *at* China." The community man cannot but feel that the life of the missionary is a constant protest against his own, with its frankly irreligious temper and its too frequent exhibition to the Chinese of "foreign vice."

It is manifestly absurd to accept his jeers and objurgations as expert judgment upon missions. But it is to these foreign community residents that the average tourist is indebted for his information or misinformation about mission work. Not one tourist in a hundred, says Mr. McCormick, ever visits the missions or any part of the interior. In general, he comes home to repeat the stories he has heard in the English clubs of Hong Kong and Shanghai. The value of this testimony, based upon a vaunted "personal observation," is negligible. As to the commercial value of the enterprise, Mr. McCormick is entirely at one with Mr. Holcombe. These coinciding judgments regarding the value of missions to the trade and commerce of both China and America, coming as they do from keen and qualified observers who are not themselves committed in any way to a religious propaganda, ought to carry to every unprejudiced mind very great weight.

In concluding his suggestive article, Mr. McCormick "lists" the opportunities now presented to America to make good with China and to repair her somewhat dilapidated fortunes in the Middle Kingdom. These opportunities are twelve in number. Two of the twelve must be particularized: "to extend banks and missions," "to stop condemnation of missions and quarreling among ourselves." Mr. McCormick appears to be concerned for missions not so much from admiration for the devoted lives of the missionaries themselves as from the conviction that missions form an indispensable agency in the moral, intellectual, and commercial development of China. It can hardly be expected, perhaps, that the man on the street who is accustomed to class the missionary and the mother-in-law together as furnishing an inexhaustible supply of material for jests, will ever learn wisdom. But the other man, the man who with all his errors and limitations does in his heart take Christianity, its claims, and its ideals seriously, must surely, if these illuminating articles come to his notice, reconsider his hasty condemnation of the missionary enterprise as a fanatical and a futile endeavor, and begin to ask if he himself perhaps cannot do something hereafter to further it.